

STOP THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

An interview with Daniel Ellsberg

What do you think about Iran? (the raid)

The Iran raid is presented by both the Administration and the media as the equivalent of the British SAS operation freeing the hostages in the embassy in London, simply a humanitarian mission. That is why, supposedly, it was not necessary for the President to inform Congress beforehand, under the War Powers act. But certain military aspects have begun to come out about the raid, leaked to the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*. What we have learned of the planning does not contradict the assertions made by the President over the previous six months that such a raid was close to infeasible. The planning appears to have envisioned combat at the embassy in Tehran with a good possibility of losing as many as 20 hostages. The contingency of considerable combat included two heavily-armed C-130's which would spray rockets and machine-gun fire at crowds of civilians in Tehran, converging on the embassy. The planning further called for high-performance jets of our own being over the city at the time and in the "event" of armed combat, destroying the airfields. So the operation includes an enormous level of destruction in Tehran itself and in the surrounding airfield. I watched very similar operations in the Pentagon when I was there. I believe I recognize it primarily as a military strike against Iran with the cover explanation of the protection of American lives.

Why would it serve Pentagon interests to have a military strike like we have just seen in Iran, supposedly to free the hostages?

A number of purposes are served, especially in this election year. The raid demonstrated that the President "had the will to shed blood for a cause." It definitely serves President Carter's interests in keeping his job. There is a desire among people who have great influence on our choice of candidates, people in major corporations in this country, in the dominant, which is to say conservative, leadership in Congress and their allies in the Pentagon, to make U.S. threats of military intervention credible to other countries in the Middle East, specifically, and in the Third World at large.

To what extent do you think the Iran raid was backed up by a nuclear threat?

I don't think that there has been so much comment by high Administration figures on the possible initiation of possible tactical nuclear warfare by the United States since the Berlin crisis of 1961, which was 19 years ago. There was a story by Jack Nelson and Robert Toth in the *L.A. Times* just before the President's speech quoting unnamed high White House officials saying that they understood it was impossible for the U.S. to stop the Russians in that part of the world with non-nuclear means. Therefore it might be necessary to initiate nuclear warfare. Immediately after the President spoke, a top secret report was leaked to the *New York Times*, obviously with high level authorization, on military options in the Middle East. This report concluded, that it would be impossible to prevail against the Russians so close to their own border without the use of tactical nuclear weapons, which were therefore recommended.

What was the purpose of the leaks?

To answer the critics and in particular to use this occasion to begin to prepare the most attentive public, the ones who read the front page of their newspaper, to the possibility of initiating the use of tactical nuclear weapons: not mainly against Russians.

I believe we have been moving toward a policy of explicit threat of nuclear weapons ever since the discrediting of our policy in Vietnam to substitute troops and non-nuclear weapons for the nuclear threats that were used in the 1950's. A more dominant reaction for a few years was to rely on a joint policy of collaboration with the Russians of preserving world order. That period was given the name of detente. It was a real break from the cold war. The current situation is very similar to the old cold war period. Not that we have suddenly discovered that Russia is really after all behind everything in the world that hurts our corporate interests, but rather that the cold war perception has come again to be seen as indispensable to the interventions that corporate leaders want to make in the rest of the world.

Inside the Pentagon one is pretty well protected from the notion that the plans for mass killing that you are frequently involved in designing are for the purpose of protecting the profits of Exxon. It would be hard for either civilians or soldiers to bring themselves to kill people for Mobil in this country.

What is the role of the Trilateral Commission, and does it make a difference who is elected President?

Well, the Trilateral Commission is something of a club with members picked by David Rockefeller of the Chase Manhattan Bank, and George Bush and John Anderson are both rather recent inductees. We see that for a man who is almost magically transported to the vicinity of the White House, like Jimmy Carter in the last election and John Anderson in this election, gaining the confidence of David

2.
Rockefeller is a very good beginning on the path to the presidency.

How does that apply to Ronald Reagan?

Reagan is not part of that club, but Carter and Bush are coming very close to those policies that Reagan has held all along. Until last year, those policies around which the Trilateral Commission was formed were in part policies of detente with Russia, with an encouragement of regional sub-powers to represent our interests.

Now all of a sudden, the whole policy of reliance on regional powers to do our threatening and our fighting for us becomes suspect after the fall of the shah. Regional powers are surprisingly vulnerable to nationalism. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, South Africa are potentially unstable. Now there is a need for us not just to supply arms to the shah and to South Africa, but to do the fighting ourselves. Those business people who both represent the international interests of the business community, and whose own institutions are most dependent and involved in international affairs see a need for direct U.S. intervention in the affairs of the Third World.

Is there a point at which small scale nuclear weapons used in military operations in third world countries would lead inevitably to nuclear holocaust?

We are in a world where by 1985 over thirty countries will have fissile material from a nuclear reactor program, and the other necessary technology to make nuclear weapons. You have a supersaturated solution where a single disturbance can suddenly crystallize a whole new system, a whole new structure and organization. The use of nuclear weapons by anyone will be an event which will tip a great number of countries toward developing nuclear weapons on an operational level, using them actively in threats, and eventually in combat.

But nuclear weapons haven't been used on people for 35 years. When they are used on people for the first time since Nagasaki, I don't think it will be 35 weeks before they are used again. We would then be heading into an era in which nuclear weapons are used as conventional weapons, instruments of war on a par with the other instruments of war. What has kept the weapons from being actually exploded in the world in the last 35 years, and has kept most countries from getting them, has been the almost universal sense on the part of publics in the world that these weapons are somehow illegitimate, to be used—at worst—only in cases of the greatest urgency, of national survival.

Presidents have gone to extreme lengths to keep the public from being aware that in fact they have not only contemplated but actively threatened nuclear weapons in situations that weren't remotely comparable. We have lost our nuclear superiority, yet threats are still being made. In fact, Presidents are likely to make stronger, more ambitious nuclear threats than in the past. They will almost surely have to carry some of them out. Therefore, they can no longer operate under the cover of secrecy. Nuclear threats, nuclear ultimatums, can no longer be conducted entirely as a covert policy.

Why is that?

You have to contemplate that some of the threats will be called, and you will have to carry them out.

If public opinion was to begin an abolitionist movement regarding nuclear weapons, then could it be unilateral, or would we have to say, "Well, Russia would have to do it too?"

Our problem is not simply to jog the conscience or to alert our national leaders to a problem, but is actually to oppose their considered positions. And that means not only in this country, but in most countries of the world. Ours is the country that most needs to be turned around, that can make the most difference if we were to throw our national weight on the side of stopping the arms race, of stopping producing nuclear weapons, of moving away from the threat of nuclear weapons.

What I think we are seeing, after Vietnam, after the Second World War, after the First World War—after a variety of warnings—is imperialism as usual, in the U.S., in Russia, and all over the world. But now with nuclear weapons.

So there are two ways in which the prospects ahead are very gloomy. One is simply that the patterns of oppression that we have seen for thousands of years and specifically throughout this century, show no signs of abating—on the contrary, wars and oppression seem to be in the future as in the past.

But second, to spread around these new thermo-nuclear toys as instruments of that process, has prospects for mass murder that dwarf anything that has ever been seen before. I can explain the difference between an atom bomb of the Hiroshima type, an A-bomb, and the H-bombs which are standard now, by pointing out that the H-bombs use atom-bombs for triggers. The activities of the engineers at Rocky Flats where these triggers are made are equivalent to the designers of Auschwitz. Auschwitz killed two million people in its operations. Each individual bomb of the larger size that Rocky Flats prepares kills two million people if it's dropped near two million, or six million people if it is dropped near six million.

One can hope that public attitudes can be mobilized to create a movement that would overpower our national policy and change it. In our democracy, with all its limits, numbers could be made effective, the imperial policies of our leaders could be changed. And the best example of a success in such an effort was the fact that against the wishes of our national leadership the Vietnam war was ended.

If we were to propose an actual stop to the weapons race, and to take steps unilaterally in the short run of showing good faith by stopping such new weapons as the Trident, the MX, the cruise missile, the neutron bomb, the Russians would be faced with two choices. They could go "up" themselves in any case, which would simply mean a continuation of the

arms race on both sides, since they could be sure we would renew our own production in that case. Or they could match us in stopping.

I don't believe that an all-out holocaust is the most likely event in the next five or ten years, or twenty years even—or even very likely. Though it is definitely possible. It could occur, any day, as the result of almost any non-nuclear conflict almost anywhere in the world. But I think it's necessary to say realistically that the odds favor the following development: That nuclear weapons will be used, first demonstratively, perhaps, not on cities but on military targets of some sort—but before very long, on a city. And small wars will be followed by somewhat larger wars.

Hundreds of thousands of people will go in a day, millions will be destroyed in a day, and this will happen every now and then, in the course of a year or a decade, repeatedly. This will take place primarily in the peripheral areas where the wars of the last 30 years mainly have been fought. It will simply shorten and intensify similar sorts of wars, in Africa, perhaps Latin America, Asia, perhaps the periphery of Europe, places like Cypress and Turkey and Greece.

One other almost certain development will be extreme moves toward authoritarianism in most parts of the world, and a considerable move toward it in all parts of the world. The panic and uncertainty in this kind of world will encourage the public to accept authority and discipline very readily. So democracy, even in the most advanced countries, may be one of the first casualties.

Eventually, one or another of these wars triggers off something fairly large. And that is not the end. The wars continue until most of the weapons that Livermore and Los Alamos and the Russians have produced do go off. And that ends most life in the northern hemisphere. I am putting off the overall holocaust by some period—maybe ten, or twenty, or fifty years. Indeed, one of the things that is going to make the process harder to reverse is the discovery that the worst didn't happen, and that one can live with occasional explosions of nuclear weapons.

Humanity has learned, somewhat to its surprise, that nuclear weapons can be possessed by some countries without being exploded in combat from year to year, and even without spreading very rapidly. Possession is somehow compatible with survival, at least from year to year. Possession does not necessarily lead very quickly to use in combat. I believe that use in combat will lead, in contrast, very quickly, to further use. But when the explosion occurs, the results are much more difficult to reverse. Now is the time to stop this process. It is a very short period. And the chance of stopping it, while not large, and while less than it used to be, is much, much larger than it will be a few years from now.

We've got to stop our leaders from openly making those nuclear threats, as Carter is doing now. And I think we have a real chance of doing that. A movement should aspire to reinforce the sense of illegitimacy of initiating nuclear war. We should have a "no-first-use" policy, and urge the Russians to join. And then demand that both sides begin to act, consistent with such a policy of refraining from any initiation of nuclear war. We should ^{both} take the tactical weapons out of the theatre. We should withdraw them from our carriers all over the sea. We should stop the addition of new types of tactical weapons, like the neutron bombs and so should the Russians.

like Reagan.

"Nuclear Armaments," a more in depth 11 page interview with Dr. Ellsberg is available for 70¢ (10¢ for each additional plus postage) from:

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Daniel Ellsberg (white hat) sits-in with protesters at Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant, April 29, 1978. He was also among the speakers at the legal rally held there last April 19 which drew 16,000.